* Reduction of rural VSAT license fees and spectrum charges and provision of transponders at affordable rates
* No right of way charges for networks in rural areas
* Niche Operators to be supported from USOF and exemption from spectrum charges
* No spectrum fees for usage of CorDECT and similar technologies in rural areas as well as for usage of 450 MHz
* No prior SACFA clearance for deployment of towers upto 40 m. in rural areas.
* Funds collected as Universal Access levy should be made available to USOF.

Privatization of MTNL/BSNL

151. SHRI A. VIJAYARAGHAVAN: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether more than thousand Group 'A' officials were reverted to parent department during October, 2005;

(b) if so, the details thereof including the reasons therefor the above mass scale reversion;

(c) if so, the steps taken in details to avoid a rudderless situation in MTNL and BSNL after the reversion of the above senior officials; and

(d) if so, whether there is any move to privatize the above two public sector companies?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (DR. SHAKEEL AHMAD): (a) to (c) On corporatisation of service providing functions of the Department of Telecommunications, officers working in Department of Telecom Services (DTS) and Department of Telecom Operaitons (DTO) were transferred to Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL)/Mahanagar Telephone Nigam Limited (MTNL) on deemed deputation basis. These officers were required to give their option for absorption in BSNL/MTNL or revert back to the

Government. Accordingly about 3,97,000 employees belonging to Group B,C, and D gave their respective option, and their absorption process (Group B in MTNL and Group B, C and D in BSNL) was completed by 2003-2004. The process of absorption of Group A officers (numbering about 3000, including 2,2000 ITS) commenced in March 2005. In order to seek their option, letter dated 24.03.2005 was issued. On expiry of the sanctioned term of deemed deputation on 15.10.2005 another letter dated 18.10.2005 was issued by the Department of Telecommunications regarding repatriation of all such Group A officers [of Indian Telecom Service (ITS) and other services] who had either not exercised their option or had opted for Government service-provided such officers were not covered by the interim stay orders granted by various courts.

This action has not affected the Telecom Services in the country. This is because alternative arrangements have been made by posting officers who have opted for BSNL/MTNL from Group A, B categories in Exchanges. These measures have been adequate for smooth functioning of telecom services.

2. A large number of cases filed by Group A officers of Indian Telecom Service (ITS) and other services individually and through their Associations challenging the letters dated 24.03.2005 and/or 18.10.2005 are pending adjudication by various Benches of Central Administrative Tribunal (CAT) and High Courts. As on date, pending final disposal of cases, interim orders of various Benches of CAT and High Courts are in operation.

3. Thus, the subject matter of absorption of Group A officers in BSNL/ MTNL and of repatriation of Group A officers of Indian Telecom Service (ITS) and other services pursuant to the letters dated 24.03.2005 and/or 18.10.2005 being under adjudication by the courts of law, is at present *sub-judice*.

(d) No, Sir. There is no move to privatize either BSNL or MTNL.

Change of Faulty PCOs in Ajmer

†152. DR. PRABHA THAKUR: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the equipments installed at the PCOs in the

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.